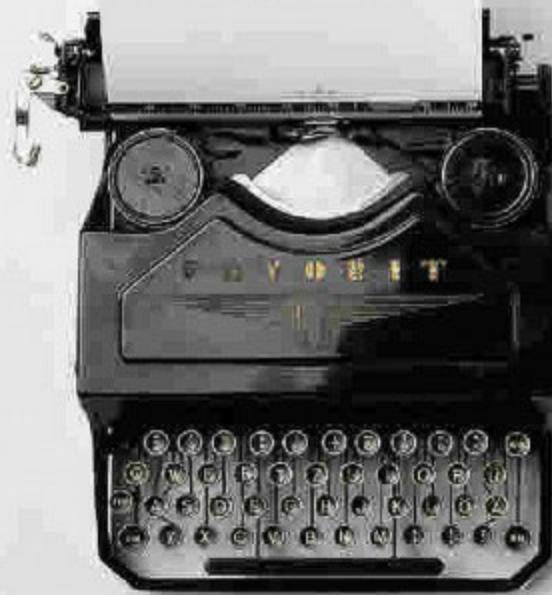


Creative Writing 101

How to Get Started

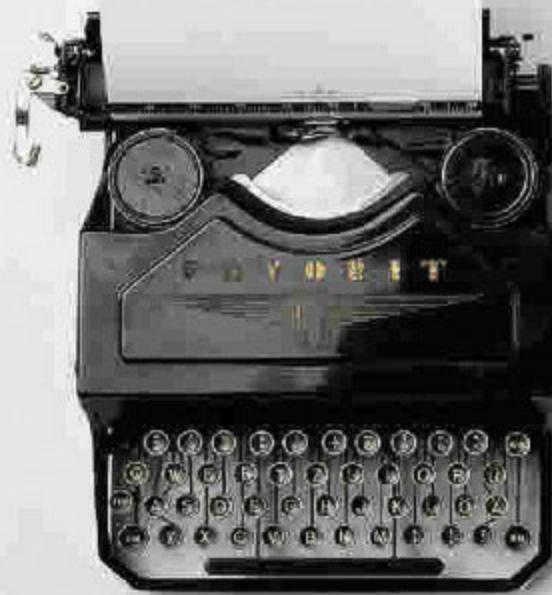


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Creative Writing 101

How to Get Started

By Bardicblogger

Contents

My Unofficial Writing Rules

Opening Scenes in Fiction

How to Start Writing Fiction

Finding Your Voice

Writing from a Perspective

The Perils of Being Too Organized

Story Ideas Where They Really Come From

My Unofficial Writing Rules

Feel free to disagree with these rules. These are just what I have found works for me.

1. Don't butcher your writing, revise it but don't hack it to pieces.
2. Keep it as your baby and not your finances. You can still plan to sell it but don't forget your love for it.
3. Money is for survival alone and nothing to do with ART.
4. Patience, don't let bad situations push you into rushing or writing something you really don't want to write.
5. Write first, worry about how it will be received later.
6. Don't write down every single thing. Write things down but be careful you don't overload yourself with information and ideas and begin pressurizing yourself.
7. Revise the oldest project first so that you don't feel it's dragging on.
8. Don't think revising needs to be methodical. It just comes with time.
9. Writing is like a relationship, too much nagging at it drives it away.
10. Stay focussed on the now. You can plan ahead but not too much.
11. There are no rules.

Opening Scenes in Fiction

It begins with a spark, as most things do. you have an idea for a story and you want to write but you don't know how to start.

FIRST LET'S LOOK AT THE PURPOSE OF THE BEGINNING:

The opening of any work of fiction is the part that catches people's attention. Many people will stop reading if they don't like the first scene or (like me) may read a few more pages to see if it picks up. Some readers forgive poor starts if the rest of the story is compelling, others may be less forgiving.

The first scene is the introduction of your story. Its intention is to draw the reader in and whet their interest. Personally, I think it's more than that, it's the scene which establishes a relationship between the writer and reader. More often than not, the opening scenes will set the tone for the whole novel.

So, let's get an example story to work with first:

Imagine you're writing a story. It's about a woman known as D.L. who was working in a bank until it was held up by bank robbers. After a brush with death she decided to follow her dream of buying her own farm and moved to a remote valley. The novel is about something happening that interrupts her new peaceful life.

Types of beginnings:

THE HISTORY LESSON -

E.g. She'd lived in Michigan all her life until five years ago she'd been working in a bank when...

Telling much of the character's situation and back story before any action. I think of this as the 'Somewhere in a galaxy, far, far away' or the 'Once upon a time' opening. It's not usually advisable to put a large amount of back story in the opening as it dramatically slows down the pace but it can work if done well.

SETTING THE SCENE

The rolling hills of the valley were a beautiful sight. A pickup truck travelled along the beaten path carrying several chicken coops.

This is usually the description scene. Slow but steady, it works to set the scene and can include dialogue and/or action. This can include significant

story events or just be create a sense of setting within your story. Especially useful if you're trying to create a sense of nostalgia or slow the pace.

EVERYDAY LIFE

Benjamin loaded the chicken feed in the back of D.L.'s pickup truck. He was the owner of the local store, an aging man with the strength of someone half his age.

This is where you start with a scene showing what the main character's normal life is like. This means that when the story progresses we are able to see the changes. This is used a lot in films and television shows to introduce the main character to the audience.

ACTION/IN THE MIDDLE (IN MEDIA RES)

The pickup truck ground to a halt. "Turn back," said the man. "It's not safe. Turn back!" D.L. didn't recognize him but behind him she could see smoke rising from the valley.

Starts in the middle of the action to create suspense. Quicker, more interesting and can make for a great opening. This can be done with description, action or dialogue and is often a preferred option, especially

for novels and stories with a faster pace. The only danger is if the reader doesn't understand what's going on or why they should care. Be careful to balance this and use the following scenes for clarity.

DIALOGUE

“It’s not safe!” “Why? What’s going on?” D.L. turned off the engine getting out of the car.

Effective opening for creating curiosity. We don't know why it's not safe or any of D.L.'s history yet so the reader's imagination starts moving ahead and wondering what's going on. Dialogue is rarely used alone as a beginning scene and usually includes one of the other BEGINNING TYPES, such as action and description. Again, remember that the reader has to be able to follow it and understand what's happening.

AT THE END(FLASHBACKSTORY)

D.L. stumbled around the ruins of her farm, trying to find her shotgun in the rubble. They weren't going to get her without a fight. She wouldn't let the bad guys win, not this time!

This starts at/or near the end of the story and then uses flashbacks to tell the rest of it. This can be hard to pull off but when done well can be very interesting and creates more of a non-linear story or mystery. Remember, there are no rules to say that the beginning has to start at the beginning. It can start in the middle, in the end or really anywhere in the timeline that you deem suitable. Just make sure people can understand it!

FIRST-PERSON EXAMPLE

I turned off the engine and got out of the pickup truck.

” Turn back. It’s not safe!”

“Why?” I asked. “What’s wrong?”

Of course, what kind of story you’re writing and the perspective you’re writing from will affect the opening. A first-person story may start with one of the previous beginning types as well but will be written from the first-person perspective.

So, there you have it. There are several ways to start a story and all of them set a different tone and speed. Which you choose is up to you but you can tell the same story in several different ways and you can even start anywhere in the timeline. Where you do will undoubtedly affect how the reader perceives your character and the story.

How to Start Writing Fiction

Step 1 – Imagination

This may sound obvious but this forms the beginning of any creative writing venture. An idea, a spark, an image, a thought or scenario. Just today I walked past a story in the street. I saw a single poker chip just sitting there on the pavement/sidewalk and wondered how it got there.

Step 2 – Writing a story

The first time you ever attempt to write a story you shouldn't worry too much about whether it's good. Just write the story you want to write, how you want to write it. Before I ever wrote a full-length novel I wrote many shorter stories. When I was eight I would just write stories no matter how ridiculous or badly written. I focussed only on the characters and the story. Each time you write one you learn something new.

Step 3 – Find a Revision Process

I had plenty of practise writing stories but one thing I hadn't practised was revising them. I use the word revising rather than editing because it evokes a less competitive image in my mind. Everyone says be ruthless with revising but I've found that you need to be careful of being too ruthless. Often, you'll re-write a scene thinking it's better that way and people will prefer the original anyway. Do re-write and re-write but keep the originals so you can compare the previous to the new version.

Step 4 – Get Feedback

The trick to this is choosing the right people. You can ask friends or family that are interested in the sort of story you've written but be warned not everyone cares or is interested in fiction. The wrong kind of reviewer won't be helpful at all. You can also post it online at a writing site or writing group or blog. Always remember to add a copyright notice (c) and make sure that the site allows you to retain full copyright over your work.

QUICK TIP:

If you are stuck for words on your first attempt try a kind of automatic creative writing. This involves allowing the first words or images that come to your mind to flow and then just writing it down. You ideally want to try to write as soon as the thought pops into your mind, rather than thinking about it a lot and then writing. Once you've learnt to do this you will be able to

write spontaneously. You can also do mind maps, brain-storming or just random word play and scribbles.

There is, of course, much more involved in writing fiction but this is a good place to start if you've never written any fiction before.

Finding Your Voice

1. Stop writing how you think you should write.

We often try to be the sort of writer we think we should be and not the writer we actually want to be.

At heart, I'm a fantasy writer and more sporadic than disciplined. It doesn't mean I will never attempt to write other stuff but that's where my heart lies.

2. Be honest with yourself.

Okay so I know we're supposed to read the classics and gush over them but I'm going to go out on a limb and admit the truth: I don't like a lot of classic literature. It's not a popular viewpoint but it's how I feel so read what you like to read. Your own voice will find its way out if you stay true to yourself.

3. Put aside thoughts of limitation.

Think big and think without pressure.

Remember when you were a child and you had ideas for doing new projects and you didn't care if they were never worked out. The greatest minds in the

world allowed for experimentation. If you spend too much time thinking things aren't possible then you'll never get off the ground. Just enjoy it.

4. Don't write for other people

It can be nerve-wracking putting opinions out there. It opens the door for people to disagree with you and put them down. But if you are writing what you think people want to hear and not what you believe then you won't be happy with it. This links back to number 2 and being honest with yourself.

5. *Don't take it personally.*

This is by far the hardest thing for a writer. After all everything we write is personal. Yet often people just have different opinions and they are entitled to do so. Try to remain polite but keep doing what you believe in.

6. *Forget everything you've learned about creative writing.*

After several years of reading about writing and learning everything you can, you'll often find yourself suddenly at a standstill. What's happened? You'll wonder where you went wrong. Now is the time to forget everything you've learned and go back to basics. Write like you did when you first started writing. Without even knowing it, much of what you learned has sunk in and been integrated yet you have kept that love for what you are doing.

It's easy to get caught up in the rat race, even as an aspiring writer. Remember why you started in the first place and you'll keep on track. The main thing is to overcome that initial fear of how your writing will be received and what others will think.

Writing From a Perspective

Whether you're writing an article, a cooking recipe or a full-length novel, perspective is one of the most important things to consider.

Writing is more than just telling a story or giving an opinion, it's how you write that directs the experience of the reader. In order to understand what perspective to use (if you haven't started out knowing that already) you need to know a couple of basic things:

1. Audience – Who is it aimed at? You don't need to obsess about this but is it a teenage paranormal fantasy book or a factual book or a how-to guide. Who's going to be reading it?
2. Genre – This is tied in with audience. Is it horror, fantasy, science-fiction/speculative fiction? If you're writing a horror for adults it should undoubtedly be much more frightening or dark than a teenage horror book, although there is a fine line between teenage and adult fiction.
3. Narrative – There are several different narrative techniques you can approach which I will detail in my next post. These include 1st Person, 2nd Person and 3rd Person narrative as well as past tense, present tense and future tense and formal and informal. I'll spend more time in my next post explaining the differences and usages.

4. Forget Everything I Just Said! – There are no set rules for writing only ideas. Don't focus too much on details at first. Sometimes you'll do all the above without even realising it.

The Perils of Being Too Organized

Organization is one of those buzz words people frequently use to make people more goal-focused, like productivity, motivation or success.

It's easy to get sucked into the ORGANIZATION TRAP

It usually begins small, with a calendar (to stop you forgetting things) or a desire to work towards achieving something (usually after comments such as 'what are you doing with your life?') and then slowly and surely it spirals into a schedule or a time-orientated lifestyle.

'Why's this a problem?' you might ask.

It's not, at least until organizing becomes pressurizing and scheduling. It really depends on your personality. Some people are super-motivated, get up every morning, exercise, write and run forward onto the day.

I'm more of a, force myself away from my comfortable bed, take ages to get going, work really hard with some distant, foggy goal in mind, person. I take advantage of impetus and nudge myself to get on with it when I'm being too lazy.

So I recently took down my calendar, decided to forget my beliefs about time limits and changed my motivational white board for a push-pin notice board so I can make use of my favourite writing technique:

Scribbling down random ideas and then forgetting about them. all the while trying to keep my novel-writing somewhere at the back of my mind

I've recently come to the conclusion that much of creative writing comes from the unconscious mind and that we need to allow it time to breath and bring up the ideas randomly.

Sure, I could spend my life crafting scenes, driving to get better and better, (I probably will try to anyway) but I also want to keep my sanity and so maybe time-pressuring and extreme motivation techniques aren't for me.

It's only after much straying off the path I realised that I was on the right path to start with. I don't know, maybe much of it came from self-doubt, which can throw you into wandering blindly down other people's paths, in case they are right and you're wrong.

Or maybe sometimes you just need to take away all the signposts and let yourself fumble around in the darkness until it becomes clear.

So, here's to the motivated but unorganized life.

WHO'S WITH ME?

Story Ideas (Where They Really Come From)

Okay most of us have heard the old 'write what you know' adage. This is okay when writing articles or how-to guides (unless you're going to research them first) but what about fiction? What about fantasy and sci-fi?

I have never been abducted nor met an alien (at least to my knowledge) so how can I write what I know if I'm writing an alien abduction story?

Where do story ideas really come from?

The Common Answer – From what you know, search through lists and newspapers and films and books you like etc.

The Alternative Answer – We don't know. That's right, no one knows! Don't go searching too hard for ideas. What you will often end up with is a stack of ideas that seemed good at the time but now seem boring and which you have lost interest in. Scribbling down ideas so you don't forget them is helpful but your brain will often remember the better one's and forget the dull ones anyway. Write down ones you really, really want to keep to work on for, let's say, tomorrow or next week, but stockpiling them can just give you more and more bits of paper floating around that you don't want or need.

The best way to find ideas is just to be open to them. Watch TV, read books, listen to music, go out and do stuff. You'll find ideas. Don't think about it too much and they'll often pop up out of the blue.

There was an episode of X-Files on TV today which was filmed like an episode of Cops called X-Cops. My first thought was 'what a great idea '. I wondered if the writers of the show were watching Cops one day and just thought 'a-ha, X-Files meets Cops'. Maybe they started picturing how Mulder and Scully would react in that situation.

The point I am trying to make is that ideas come from you.

While other things will sometimes trigger them and you'll sometimes see something and think 'yeah, that's a good idea. I'll write...' most fiction novels are just made up from the writer's imagination.

They may come from the unconscious mind or from mixing two concepts or genres. They may be inspired by what you do for a living and what you experience on a day-to-day basis. That doesn't mean you necessarily have to be aware of them.

I know from personal experience that trying to make 'concepts' work in writing actually has the opposite effect for me. It's better, in my opinion, to write what you want to write because it interests you. Let the daydreams, ideas, thoughts, feelings, images you create inspire you.

This is not always a popular answer.

People want something tangible. They want some sort of plan or secret formula that will help them write. But fiction writing is actually the opposite of planning and structure. It comes from the creative side which yearns to explore and, most importantly, it comes from wanting to write stories. In short, we just make it up!

Thank you for reading Creative Writing 101. I hope that enjoyed it and that it helps you start writing and keep writing.

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